

The Playboy of the Netherworld

239

And even a lily of the valley becomes a jester
with cap
and bells, a symbol that motley is all men's
wear. He
follows beauty for ever through a maze, like
some hidden
Rosamond; he is himself

the bird
That can go up the labyrinthine winds
Upon his pinions and pursues the summer.

He can turn to lucid grace the image of
ambiguity itself:

I know not whether
I see your meaning; if I do, it lies
Upon the wordy wavelets of your voice
Dim as the evening shadow in a brook
When the least moon has silver on't no
larger
Than the pure white of Hebe's pinkish nail.

There is nothing of which he cannot make
music; even
the streaks of rain seen in dark lines against
the blue back-
ground of a showery sky become for his
fingers the chords
of a fantastic lyre. And yet with all his clever
elaboration
he can also be agonisingly simple:

They are both dead, and God has suffered it;

*: or again:

Now I shall see him
No more. All Hell is made of those two
words.

Still, Beddoes is seldom thus direct. He
writes less of
what he sees than of his thoughts in seeing
it; what he
describes is not so much like itself as like
something else;
and so a great part of both his strength and
his sweetness
will be found stored in his metaphors and
similes. Like
the Lady of Shalott, he watches the world
remotely, in a
strange mirror; like the Emperor Domitian,
he walks,
with terror about him, in a gallery of
looking-glass.

Magic beauty and terror—as in his style

and rhythm,
so in his mind and soul, these two seem to me
his essential
qualities, moving inseparably side by side. It
might have
been of him that Victor Hugo wrote: